

Will Your 2021 be Hellish or Heavenly?

I suspect most of us will be very glad to see the back of 2020 but rather anxious about what sort of year 2021 will turn out to be. Most of us will assume - without ever questioning this assumption - that whether our 2021 turns out to be hellish or heavenly depends on what happens in the world around us. Will a mass vaccination programme halt the spread of Covid 19? Will Brexit ruin all that is good about the UK or be the start of a more prosperous, less contentious era? Will we start to get a handle on climate change?

However, whilst the world around us definitely effects our plans for the future, and at times totally scuppers them, I know that whether my own 2021 turns out to be hellish or heavenly primarily depends on my state of mind rather than the state of the world. I also now know that I can definitely change my mind. I can choose to dwell in heaven rather than hell, regardless of what is going on in the world around me. I may not have yet mastered this key to living a fulfilling and contented life moment to moment. But I do now have some idea about how this core life skill works and I would love to share this with you as we move into the New Year.

First of all, I now make a concerted effort day by day to challenge any fearful thoughts that pop up uninvited into my consciousness. For example, Gloria and I have booked to go to Assisi again in May and whenever the thought 'What if we still cannot fly to Italy by May?' pops into my mind, I tell myself 'Stop it! What will be, will be and whatever happens will be for your highest good.'

Next, I make sure that I spend quite some time every day doing activities that lift my spirits and calm my over-thinking mind. Even if the weather seems unpromising, I find that a walk along the River Mersey is always filled with natural beauty and the physical act of walking in nature lifts my energetic vibration and quietens my over-active mind. What do you do every day to lift *your* spirits? Please do not tell me you do not have any time to look after yourself like this. Even if you are a particularly busy bee, you can still find some time each day to sit back and enjoy the honey!!

Walking alone in nature comes naturally to me, but staying in touch with friends and loved ones is something I really have to work on. I am quite introverted and this pandemic has exacerbated my tendency to enjoy being all by myself. However, human beings are biologically built for social interaction and so I have made a real effort over 2020 to stay in touch with friends and loved ones.

During 2020, I even made an effort to meet up with a friend occasionally for a walk or a socially-distanced cup of coffee. I firmly told myself that these one-to-one physical interactions would be perfectly safe, despite all the media panic around Covid. Throughout 2020, I obeyed *most* of the lockdown rules, but I strongly resisted the temptation to see other beautiful human beings as potential virus carriers, rather than as love, joy and friendship carriers.

I am not at all convinced that totally hiding away from the world is healthy - not even in the midst of a pandemic. This year in particular, I keep remembering Master Jason Chan telling us many times that it is fine to be cautious in this world, but we should not stop ourselves doing something worthwhile because of irrational or over the top fear or anxiety. Even in 2020, most of us were perfectly safe from dying of Covid, but possibly at much greater risk of other health problems brought on by isolation or inactivity.

In 2021, we will certainly hope that fear of catching Covid will rapidly fade away, but there is a real danger that we will get used to the idea that it is much safer to hide away at home than to go out to enjoy the world around us. Yet leading a life of miserable isolation might well lead to far more health problems in the long run than doing potentially dangerous things that lift our spirits.

Even if you do not have much time for uplifting hobbies, and even if your health is so fragile that you really cannot get out and about, there is still such a lot you can do to lift your spirits on a daily basis. For example, how about doing this simple exercise that I have taken from one of the Mindfulness Association's guided online meditations?

Sit in a comfortable position with a straight spine. Now take 21 long, deep, mindful breaths. (I like to count to 21 on my fingers as I do this). Next, bring into your mind something beautiful that you have seen in the last few days, feel the joy of it and then say a silent 'Thank you' for that gift. Then, bring to mind something you have heard that made your heart sing – maybe a bird chirping or a lovely piece of music - and again feel the joy of it before saying 'Thank You' for that uplifting experience.

Next keep going for a short while bringing to mind recent or even long-past experiences that have brought you joy. As you do this, bring the memory and energy of that particular joyful time into every cell of your being. Finally, gently open your beautiful heart and keep filling it up with the uplifting energy of gratitude for all the gifts that the universe constantly sends to you. Do this practice for 10-15 minutes and at the end of it, simply notice how you feel.

I guarantee that if you do this short and simple exercise throughout 2021, you will find so much to appreciate in your life, even if it gets quite challenging from time to time.

I would like to conclude this New Year message by suggesting that one way to enjoy a pretty heavenly year in 2021 - whatever the weather, whatever the government does or does not do, whatever the economy does, and whatever the restrictions may turn out to be on our freedom of movement - would be to follow this wonderful (slightly adapted) advice from A Course in Miracles:

***Try then in 2021 to begin to look on all things with love,
appreciation and open-mindedness.***

(A Course in Miracles, Workbook lesson 29 p.45)

Happy New Year!
Peggy Foster